

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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LIVING CONDITIONSGeneral Comments on Standard of Living

1. There was a considerable improvement in the price and availability of consumer goods after 1946, especially after the currency reform. Progress after the currency reform had been brought about by periodic price reductions.
2. There were some loopholes in the price reduction laws which should not be overlooked. For example, the price of butter was cut from 45 rubles to 30 rubles at the time of the last price decrease. Three grades of butter were sold at prices of 30, 35, and 39 rubles per kilogram. However, only the most expensive grade was available after the price cut.
3. The Soviets still live very primitively, still have a very low standard of living despite these advances in recent years. The simplicity of the wants and demands of the Soviet population never ceased to impress the German specialists. The Soviets were used to poor clothing and food, were accustomed to the fact that an entire family lived in one room. Life-long experience conditioned them to demand or expect little more. In fact, many Soviets simply could not understand how the German specialists could want or need six pairs of shoes instead of one, or a wardrobe full of clothing instead of one suit or dress.
4. By way of illustration, the average diet of a poor worker's family consisted almost wholly of black bread, potatoes, porridge or cabbage, and black tea. A skilled worker's family did not fare much better. Their diet included porridge, groats, cabbage, potatoes, black bread, tea, and vodka. They ate little meat and seldom had eggs. Suet was purchased in place of butter or oil, and cheap candy instead of expensive sugar.
5. The average Soviet family generally had no money left at the end of the month after paying for rent, food, and vodka. In addition, they somehow had to find the money to buy for each family member one pair of felt boots every two years, a quilted jacket every two or three years, and cheap cotton for shirts, dresses, and underwear.
6. Incidentally, the Soviet men spent relatively large amounts of money for vodka. Women drank a little but no more than women in other countries. The male workers invariably "tied one on" at payday and undoubtedly would have done so more often if they could have afforded it. Drinking was just about their only release from daily cares. But there were not too many problem drinkers, as few could afford it.
7. The population naturally reacted favorably to the price cuts. They saw in them an indication that the government was concerned with the welfare of the people. Many people noted with approval that prices were reduced in the Soviet Union while

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they were increasing in capitalist countries. In fact, some of the intelligentsia believed that Communism could be attained in the Soviet Union in about 25 years by means of this gradual but constant improvement in living standards.

8. As noted before, I found the Soviet people to be generally satisfied with their living conditions. Most people were totally ignorant of life abroad and so seldom compared Soviet living standards unfavorably with those in capitalist countries. But, even when forced to admit that citizens of Western nations enjoyed a more prosperous life, they always seemed to have some ready excuse to explain the situation. For example, they frequently attributed the relative wealth of the Germans to Hitler's plunderings in occupied countries.

9. Soviet soldiers who were stationed in Germany must have been favorably impressed with living conditions there, but I heard no comments on this score. These ex-soldiers were probably afraid to express their opinions in public.

Prices and Availability of Consumer Goods

10. I have listed below to the best of my recollection the prices of consumer goods which were sold in state stores and in the free market in Ostashkov and on Gorodomlya Island. These prices were current in the latter part of 1951.

Prices of Goods in State Stores - 1951 (in rubles)

10 eggs	9.00
1 kilo butter	39.00
1 kilo margarine	22.00
1 kilo suet	22.00
1 kilo sugar	11.50
1 kilo salt	2.0
1 Kilo flour	8.00
1 liter milk	3.50
1 kilo macaroni	12.00
1 kilo groats	7.50
1 kilo potatoes	0.50
1 kilo peas	11.00
1 kilo beans	9.00
1 kilo apples	9.00
1 lemon	5.00
1 kilo black bread	2.00
1 kilo white bread	8.00
1 roll	0.75
100 grams chocolate	20.00
100 grams cookies	2.00
500 grams jam	12.00
1 kilo poor quality sausage	12-24.00
10 "Dukat" cigarettes	0.80
10 "Belomora" cigarettes	1.25
10 "Drug" cigarettes	3.50
10 "Troyka" cigarettes	7.50
1/2 liter vodka	27.50
1/2 liter wine	25.00
1/2 liter fruit wine	15.00
1 pair lady's shoes, Soviet manufacture	450.00
1 pair lady's "Bata" shoes	350.00

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Prices of Goods in State Stores - 1951 (in rubles) - cont'd.

1 pair felt boots	150.00
1 pair men's shoes, Soviet manufacture	500.00
1 meter good quality cloth for man's suit	400.00
1 ready-made man's suit, poor quality	730.00
1 meter good quality wool material for lady's wear	250.00
1 pair lady's nylon-type (Rapron) stockings	40.00
1 pair men's socks	15.00
1 meter cotton cloth, not color fast	9.00
1 meter silk	200.00
1 meter linen	20.00
1 meter handkerchief material	9.00
1 piece laundry soap	5.00
1 piece toilet soap	4-8.00

b. Prices of Goods Sold in the Free Market -(in rubles)

10 eggs (prices rose to 28 rubles in winter)	12-28.00
1 kilo butter	45.00
1 kilo flour	20.00
1 liter milk	5.00
1 liter sweet cream	20.00
1 liter potatoes (prices rose in winter)	1-8.00
1 kilo tomatoes	10.00
1 kilo apples	12.00
1 kilo cabbage	1.50
1 kilo carrots	3.00
1 kilo pork (prices rose in winter)	25-40.00
1 kilo beef (prices rose in winter)	15-25.00
1 kilo lamb (prices rose in winter)	12-15.00
1 kilo bacon	45.00
1 kilo honey	35.00
1 lemon	6.00

11. Many items were in permanent, temporary, or seasonal short supply. Flour was sold but three times a year on the occasion of the most important holidays. Even then a person could not purchase more than 500 grams at one time. Sugar was also rationed informally, as single purchases were limited to 500 grams. Butter, sugar, macaroni, potatoes, margarine, suet, bread, and rolls were seldom available in state stores. Shoppers stood for hours in queues to buy these items when available.
12. Such goods as shoes, woolen material for ladies' wear, Rapron stockings, and silk cloth were not always in stock in state stores. They were almost immediately bought up when placed on sale. Felt boots were always in short supply during my stay in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, there was a limited assortment of such goods as material for men's suits, ready-made men's suits, and men's overcoats. In fact, as far as woolen material is concerned, only the very expensive material was on hand. Cheaper woolen cloth was sold out immediately.
13. I might note that prices were higher in the free market than in State stores, as in general only goods were sold in the free market which were seldom available in State establishments.

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14. Yeast was reserved for bakeries and was not supposed to be sold to private purchasers. However, it could be obtained illegally in State stores. The sale of knitting wool in State stores or public markets was also forbidden, but this article too was sold undercover. There was occasional speculation in free market and State store prices. Some articles, particularly butter, were purchased in State stores or obtained illegally in some way and were resold in the free market at a profit.

15. I heard no great complaining about these shortages of consumer goods. The average Soviet seemed to feel that what was not available he could do without. On the other hand, shoppers were almost violent in their struggle to purchase scarce items when they were available. This is certainly an indication that they felt the pinch of these shortages.

16. Almost every Soviet when commenting on shortages remarked that Ostashkov was an "emergency zone" (Notstandgebiet). They said that one could get anything in Moscow. But [redacted] who was in several prisoner-of-war camps, noted that wherever he was in the Soviet Union the local population referred to their region as an "emergency zone".

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Housing

17. The German specialists assigned to Branch No. 1 were housed in wooden apartment buildings located on the island. Bachelors and married couples with no more than one child were usually assigned one room, while families with two or more children were assigned two-or three-room apartments. Two or three families generally shared one kitchen. My family lived in one room plus a kitchen.

18. The Soviet intelligentsia who were housed on the island usually had one room per small family (up to three persons) and two rooms for a large family. However, these rather humble quarters were far better than the dwellings occupied by workers' families. In Ostashkov, where most workers resided, it was not at all uncommon for six to eight people to live in one room.

19. Rent for both German and Soviet residents of Gorodomlya Island was calculated according to the area of living space. My rent amounted to 30 rubles per month for living quarters plus about 15 rubles per month for furniture. The cost of electricity was high, about 40 rubles per month with a hot plate. Families who had an electric cooker paid about 15 or 20 rubles per month. An additional fee was imposed on residents of apartments serviced by central heating.

20. I visited a Soviet family in their home only once. While in Moscow, I was invited to the home of an interpreter employed at Branch No. 1. Her husband was a doctor, the head of a clinic in Moscow. Although this couple obviously enjoyed a high income for Soviet standards, they lived in a single room with simple, standard furniture. They too shared their kitchen with several other families. It gave me quite a shock to think that these were typical living conditions for members of the Soviet intelligentsia.

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HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE

21. Medical facilities on Gorodomlya Island and the immediate vicinity included a clinic under the supervision of Branch No. 1, located on the island itself, and a hospital situated in Ostashkov. The clinic staff included two doctors and a dentist, all of whom were female. The two doctors, incidentally, were the wives of the chief engineer and assistant engineer of the institute. Although the clinic's staff could only be characterized as mediocre, I found that the doctors at the Ostashkov hospital were quite capable in their profession. However, they all were seriously hampered by lack of proper medical instruments and equipment. Modern drugs, at least penicillin, seemed to be available in sufficient quantities.
22. Perhaps I can best describe the medical facilities there by recounting the treatment my son received when he had scarlet fever. I took my son to the clinic as soon as he came down with the disease. In Ostashkov and surrounding territory there was a minor epidemic. The doctor at the clinic ordered my son to be placed in quarantine at the Ostashkov hospital.
23. I had to walk with my son on foot to the island's dock even though he had a temperature of 102°. Once we arrived at the dock, he had to lie in the hot sun for four hours while the quarantine boat waited for orders to go.
24. After arriving at the Ostashkov hospital he was put in a primitive wooden barracks set aside for quarantine cases. They were not allowed to open the windows there for 14 days. The patients were only fed cabbage, porridge, and bread. In fact I am sure he lived only because of the food we brought him.
25. The nurses were particularly inefficient. They devoted no personal care to the patients, had no sense of cleanliness and order. Nevertheless, the doctors were quite capable and they administered enough penicillin to prevent any of the usual complications.
26. I was impressed with the excellent health of the Soviet people. except for scarlet fever, there were no serious outbreaks of epidemic or endemic diseases while I was there. Typhus was rarely reported, there was little malaria except among the German specialists, and venereal diseases were evidently not widespread.
27. We Germans were amazed to see that almost every Soviet mother who lived on Gorodomlya Island or in Ostashkov swaddled her babies until they were one-and-one-half or two years old. Babies were bound summer or winter, legs together and arms at the side. Infants were swaddled almost immediately after birth and remained so bound until the mother left the hospital. Infants were not even unbound to be bathed during this period. Wrappings were later taken off briefly from time to time when at home but never when outside.
28. I never received a satisfactory explanation of this practice. The Soviet mothers simply replied that children had always been raised in this fashion and that was reason enough. In fact the Soviets thought that we Germans were rather barbaric for allowing unclothed infants to bathe in the sun during the summer.

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WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE

29. The wives of most Soviets, workers and intelligentsia alike, were engaged in some kind of full-time employment. In fact, Soviet mothers gainfully employed were required to work up to six weeks before the birth of a child and as soon as six weeks afterwards. Pre-school children were brought to a kindergarten by their mothers in the morning at 0745 hours and picked up at night at 1730. School children were expected to fend for themselves after school hours.

30. There was but one kindergarten on Gorodomlya Island for all children from six weeks to six years of age. This kindergarten was under the direction of the institute's health clinic. Kindergarten teachers and nurses fed and otherwise were in complete charge of the children during their long nine-and-one-half hour daily schedule. The kindergarten charged a monthly tuition of from 150 to 160 rubles. Some of the female workers at Branch No. 1 complained about this high tuition fee as it was almost impossible for them to pay this sum out of their meager monthly wages. The families of engineers and other leading Soviet personnel were in a much more favorable position, as almost all of them had a hired maid (babushka) to look after their children.

31. I frequently asked my Soviet acquaintances if they were satisfied with their combined role of mother and careerist. These women were all members of the so-called intelligentsia and were engaged in professional or white collar work at the institute. I invariably received the answer that they would rather follow their profession than simply stay at home and look after children and the household. In fact they were aghast at German women who did nothing but housework all day long. They apparently were quite satisfied with their role in family and society, probably more satisfied than the men, as they were less speculative by nature.

32. The professional women in the Soviet Union apparently saw no contradiction between career and raising children. Although they spent a lot of time with their children when off duty, State institutions (schools and kindergartens) had far greater influence on the development of the children than they did. They apparently were satisfied with this dependence on state institutions and probably would not wish to alter the situation even if the system of government were to change in the Soviet Union. I know nothing about the attitude of female laborers toward this question, but assume that they hardly were in favor of the heavy manual labor which they frequently performed.

33. I was struck by the loose marriage ties which were common in the Soviet Union. It apparently was a matter of little concern whether a couple with children were married or not. A man would leave his wife and take up with another woman without giving the matter much thought. I cannot give any precise explanation of these practices but it was clear that family ties were not so close as in Western European countries. Soviet family members were more independent of one another. For example, a family never took trips or vacations as a unit but only as individuals.

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34. Divorces were uncommon, undoubtedly because they were so expensive. I was told by one of my Soviet friends that a divorce in Moscow cost 1,000 rubles, payable to a court office, plus the cost of a public announcement in a newspaper. Divorces were not considered final until such public announcements were made. I have heard that a person usually had to wait several weeks to place such an announcement because of limited newspaper space available.

ANTI-SEMITISM

35. The only direct indication I received of anti-Semitic feeling among the Soviet people occurred during a conversation between a Soviet female interpreter and several German secretaries. One of the Germans remarked that another interpreter was unpleasant to the German specialists because she was Jewish. The interpreter present blushed and got flustered at this point because she herself was Jewish. The other Germans recognized this and apologized for the remark. To this the Soviet answered, "That is all right. We Jews have a hard time here." I often heard similar remarks from Soviets. I had the general impression that although many Jews in the USSR were members of the intelligentsia and in fairly high positions, they were in some way subject to restrictions and prejudice.
36. I heard nothing of a purge of "cosmopolites" while I was in the Soviet Union. However, I did hear from a Soviet friend of mine in 1950 that many Jews were then being removed from important positions because a "Jewish plot had been uncovered in Moscow". She said that General Gonor had been removed from his position as director of Plant 88 and that Major Chertok, also a leading figure at Podlipki, had been demoted, because they were Jews. My informant maintained that a group of Jews, including many in high party and governmental positions, had plotted to overthrow the government.
37. My friend also said that food in Moscow had been poisoned by Jews involved in this plot. All stores had to be closed for several days to replace the poisoned food. I might add that my informant was an intelligent woman but inclined to exaggerate for the sake of increasing her self-importance.

COMMENTS: It should be stressed that the accuracy of the informant's evaluation of Soviet sociological attitudes is highly doubtful. Her circle of Soviet acquaintances was small, limited in effect [redacted]ment. There are three objections to accepting their expressed attitudes as truthful or as typical of Soviet society: (1) they undoubtedly were carefully screened for such employment, (2) they may have been acting as MGB informers, and (3) national patriotism might have caused them to suppress their doubts regarding the regime when talking to foreigners.7

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